

To The Members of the Joint Committee on Insurance:

SIB
301

My name is Matt Hall, and I am submitting this testimony in support of the Senate Bill 301, An Act Concerning Health Insurance Coverage for Autism Spectrum Disorders. I am currently the Chairman of the Town Council for the Town of Cheshire, and the proud parent of an autistic three year old daughter, Mari. In fact, Mari is the "cover girl" on the Birth to Three 2008 Annual Report you all received in December or January. Our experience with her diagnosis and her myriad improvements following the early intervention services she received last calendar year is featured in that report.

As a parent of an autistic child who has benefited greatly from the services we are fortunate enough to have had at our disposal, I strongly urge you to vote this legislation out of committee favorably. Early intervention and intensive service delivery to kids who are on the autism spectrum is crucial to their long term prospects as fully realized, self-sufficient adults. I suggest the long term return on this investment to the various communities that comprise Connecticut – for diminished service needs for these youngsters as they grow into adulthood – justifies the immediate cost to be borne by the admitted cultural change this legislation would require.

However, as the chair of Cheshire's municipal body, and as attorney with a small practice in town, I am acutely sensitive to the current economic climate, and the imposition of additional cost. Our firm offers health insurance to employees through the CBIA, and the immediate impact to our bottom line is likely to be noticeable. I fully anticipate that you will hear from folks today who will state that such an imposition today is unacceptable and bad for the economy.

In response to that argument, I suggest to you that the success of any small business depends on the productivity of its workforce. A family with an autistic child has its emotional resources drained on a daily basis, even those who are fortunate to have access to the best services. The emotional and social burden for many is compounded by the financial stress resulting from the diagnosis. From our own experience I can not imagine the additional burden without having access to any services, and the choices for individuals put in that position are not pleasant. It is safe to say that anyone without access to intervention and services in the absence of insurance coverage is facing a multi- decade financial and emotional challenge that will curtail to the point of eliminating his or her ability to reinvest or realize his or her full potential as a wage earner.

Therefore, in addition to the long term economic and societal benefit for autistic kids who will be able to receive insured services, there are additional short and long term economic benefits for those taxpayers whose families are dealing with the relentlessness of the diagnosis. Statistics indicate that the number of kids being assessed as being on the autism spectrum is growing, not shrinking. You have the opportunity to position Connecticut as a leader in recognizing that all of its residents across generational boundaries will benefit in the long term if *this* generation of autistic kids and their families have insured access to services vital to realizing their full potential.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Matthew S. Hall